

First Reformed Church of New Brunswick  
Neillson Street, between Bayard Street and  
Paterson Street, facing Hiram Street  
New Brunswick  
Middlesex County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-716

HABS  
NJ  
12-FEBRU  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
FIRST REFORMED CHURCH OF NEW BRUNSWICK

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Location: Neilson Street, between Bayard and Paterson Streets,  
facing Hiram Street, New Brunswick, Middlesex County,  
New Jersey

Present Owner  
and Occupant: First Reformed Church

Present Use: Worship services

Brief Statement  
of Significance: The old stone church, which stood on the site of  
the present edifice, was seriously damaged during  
the British occupation of New Brunswick (winter  
1766-1767). Temporary repairs permitted use  
until 1811, when it was razed and work begun on  
the present building. Until recent times the church  
was the scene of inaugurations of Rutgers' presi-  
dents and of Rutgers' commencements. Many past  
leaders of the Reformed Church are buried on the  
grounds.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: First Reformed Church.
2. Date of erection: The building was used for the first  
time on September 27, 1812. It was built at a cost of  
\$16,415.
3. Notes on alterations: The interior has been twice  
remodeled (1847 and 1862).

- B. Reference: Dr. Richard H. Steele, Historical Discourse,  
First Reformed Church of New Brunswick, New Jersey (1867).

Prepared by George Brokaw Howell  
Architect, Rutgers University (ret.)  
New Brunswick, New Jersey  
February 1960

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement: Built in 1812, this large stone church  
with a tall, storied tower is representative of the period.  
It is in good condition.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. General description: The building is rectangular in shape, ninety-four feet by sixty-six feet, with gable roof and a tower of stone and wood at the front. There is a cellar only under a section of the pulpit.
2. Wall construction: The walls are broken ashlar stone and beginning at the lowest window sill small stone chips have been inserted in the mortar joints. The four corners have dressed, brownstone quoins from grade to the main cornice. The front and rear gables are of ashlar stone, the rear gable having a circular window, trimmed in brownstone with four keystones. This window is above the ceiling of the sanctuary and is for exterior decoration. There is a dressed brownstone belt course across the front elevation only, midway between the lower and upper windows.
3. Roof: The gable roof is covered with slate, and about 1950 hung gutters with downspouts were added to the eaves.
4. Cornice: The main cornice of wood, painted white, runs around the four sides of the building with the crown mold section running up the rakes of the front and rear gables forming a pediment.
5. Tower: The wood and stone tower partly projects beyond the front of the building and is masonry to just above the ridge of the roof. The masonry section receives the gabled cornice of the roof against its sides and is capped with a horizontal wood cornice. The four corners of the stone section have dressed brownstone quoins and a wooden pediment at the main cornice level. Above this pediment in the masonry part of the tower is a round window trimmed in cut brownstone with four keystones. The three-story wooden part of the tower is treated as three diminishing cubes with an inward sloping copper roof, surmounted by a small spire ending in a weather vane. The lowest wooden story sits on a severe base with a tripartite, louvred window on each of the four sides, and supporting a Classical cornice, indented to form a break at the corners. On this cornice are acroteria with angel heads flanked with spreading wings on all four sides. The middle story is treated with flat pilasters of the Doric Order at the corners, supporting a full cornice which makes a double break at the corners. This pilastered treatment frames black and gold clock faces on all four sides. The topmost story is treated in a similar manner to the middle, except that the flat pilasters are Corinthian and frame louvered openings with dog-eared, molded trim.

6. Doors and windows: The church has three main entrances, one in the tower flanked by one on each side in the front wall, each with a pair of three paneled wood doors with transom-bar and semi-circular leaded glass transom in a narrow molded wood frame. The three circular headed doorways are trimmed with dressed brownstone with tripartite keystone and spring blocks. At the rear of the church are two small vestibules--pentagonal wood structures, one story high. The front elevation has three windows at the balcony level; the side elevations have five windows above five windows; and the rear has two long windows, now closed up, above the vestibules. These rear two were apparently full windows as demarcations can be seen in the plaster wall of the sanctuary. The lower windows on the side elevations have segmental heads and stone sills, with cut brownstone trim with tripartite keystones and spring blocks. The upper row of windows, directly above the lower ones, is treated similarly, except that the window heads are semi-circular.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

1. Plan: The sanctuary is one large room with a balcony on three sides (seating 1,100), approached by three individual vestibules. The flanking vestibules have curved stairways to the balconies with solid railings and inner rails built against the wall. The vestibules have ceramic tile floors in pattern. Double doors, leather covered and nail studded with a leaded glass window in each leaf, lead into the sanctuary. The three-aisled sanctuary has white pews with mahogany roll tops and scrolled ends which form the top members of paneled, hinged doors. At the front is a platform with curved steps flanking the pulpit and railings. This platform is the width of a paneled mahogany backdrop. The backdrop is balcony-high with cornice, recessed columns, and parapet. Flanking the backdrop are former choir boxes, one step below the platform, with low paneled parapets in front and a screen wall to the rear and sides. This wall is made up of small, pedestaled, Doric columns supporting an entablature and a parapet that line up with those of the balconies. Deep red velour drapes are hung between the small columns. Flanking the choir boxes and under the ends of the side balconies but projecting forward into the sanctuary are robing rooms, treated similarly to the choir boxes. These have steps down into the sanctuary and a connecting passage behind the backdrop and to the service door.
2. Floors: The floors of the sanctuary, platform, steps, choir boxes, and robing rooms are fully carpeted.

3. Balcony: The balcony is U-shaped and supported by fluted Doric columns, four down each side and two across the rear of the sanctuary. At the rear of the balcony there is a slight projection which is supported on brackets and has curved corners. This projecting portion houses the choir and organ console. The pews in the balcony are more severe than those on the main floor and have simpler mahogany top rails and scrolled ends without doors. The pews are curved around the balcony corners.
4. Walls: Plastered walls up to a large, main, wood cornice which is above the second tier of windows and completely surrounds the sanctuary. Above the cornice, on the lateral sides, is a plastered cove about eight feet high, ending in a run-plaster molding from front to rear. The windows have deep plaster splays and deep wood sills, with segmental heads over the first tier and circular heads over the upper tier.
5. Lighting: Modern electric candelabra: six two-tiered candelabra with six over twelve candles from the main ceiling; and nine six-candle candelabra under the balconies.
6. Windows: All windows, originally muntined with clear glass, have been glazed with pictured, leaded glass.
7. Heat: Steam heat is piped underground from the adjacent Church House.

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